

## Abstract

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In this paper we trace the link between language and labour from Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* to Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* to Leonard Bloomfield's *Language*, first outlining Smith's theory of language functions, then tracing the idea through the work of Hegel, Marx, Darwin, Spencer, Hermann Paul, Ludwig Noiré, and Leonard Bloomfield, all of whom claimed that language is a method of communication bounded to labour. Adam Smith, the Scottish philosopher and economist, laid the framework for a theory of language functions which makes linguistic communication the most relevant function. Furthermore, Smith (1776) conjectured that the communicative function of language, which he termed persuasion, must have brought about the division of labour. In so doing, Smith was the first to link language to labour, influencing 19th century linguistics and appearing in Bloomfield's *Language* of 1933. It is probable, though still arguable, that 19th century European Linguistics circles adopted Smith's idea, not through Smith's work directly, but rather by way of Hegel (1807).

Key words. Locke, Adam Smith, Hegel, communicative action .

## IN LOCKE'S FOOTSTEPS : LANGUAGE AND LABOUR FROM ADAM SMITH'S *WEALTH OF NATIONS* TO LEONARD BLOOMFIELD'S *LANGUAGE*.

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...car on dit qu'ils [ les sauvages ] s'imaginent que les singes pourroient parler, s'ils vouloient, mais qu'ils s'en abstiennent, afin qu'on ne les contraigne point de trauailler...

*Descartes a Chanut, 1<sup>er</sup> novembre 1646*

### 1. Introduction

In his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* ( 1690) John Locke puts forth a set of philosophical topics where the subject of Language took centre stage, devoting Book III of his *Essay* to language, i.e. words. In his work, Locke marked the culmination of a century of unrest between language and the relation of language to thought ( Aarsleff 1982, Formigari 2004, Lifschitz 2012 ). In this way, Locke offered a “ linguistic turn” to philosophy ( Hudson, 1997, Dawson 2007) and such a turn had a direct impact on the study of language as well. Since Locke, the most respected eighteenth century works have emphasized the role of language in both society and cognition. In addition, Adam Smith, whose contributions to the study of language have been a matter of inquiry in the past century, related language to economic behavior from a lockean perspective on language. One of Smith's contributions sought an explanation to the crucial feature of the division of labour, a key concept in economic behaviour. Smith proposed that the division of labour is a consequence of language as a means of communication, an idea which subsequently became pervasive in linguistic circles.

Some of Locke's theses in the *Essay*, particularly in Book III, relevant for the topic of language and labour are the following:

Firstly, language aids in the creation of society:

God having designed Man for a sociable Creature, made him not only with an inclination, and under a necessity to have fellowship with those of his own kinds, but furnished him also with language, which was to be the great Instrument, and common Tye of society ( Locke, 1690, III.i.1 ).

Secondly, language is conceived of as a means of communication of ideas, or thought, between a speaker and a hearer:

The Comfort, and Advantage of Society, not being to be had without Communication of Thoughts, it was necessary, that Man should find out of some

external sensible Signs, whereby those invisible ideas, which his thoughts are made up of, might be made known to others. For this purpose, nothing was so fit, either for Plenty or Quickeness, as articulate sounds,...( Locke, 1690, III.ii.1.).

Thirdly, words are dependent of ideas in the mind of the speaker/hearer <sup>1</sup>:

Thus we may conceive how Words,..., as the Signs of their Ideas, not by any natural connexion,..., but by a voluntary Imposition, whereby such a Word is made arbitrarily the Mark of such an Idea. The use then of Words, is to be sensible Marks of Ideas, and the Ideas they stand for, are their proper and immediate signification. (Locke, 1690, III. ii. 1 ).

These three theses make up the first paradigm of the Enlightenment view of language, which Dascal ( 2006) calls “communicative” and which Lifschitz ( 2012) labels “encoding ”.

The impact of Locke’s *Essay* attracted a variety of thinkers from Leibniz to Adam Smith to Condillac. While Leibniz criticized Locke’s theory of ideas, Condillac was sympathetic to the role of words as analytic tools in thinking. Later, Locke’s presence reached the grammatical studies of Dumarsais and other encyclopedists in France ( Lifschitz 2012, Nye 2000 ). Similarly, Smith, following the path opened by Locke, thought that linguistic communication was crucial for the understanding of basic economic and social activities such as bartering , trucking and haggling ( Smith, 1776, I).

Other traces of Adam Smith’s intellectual inquiry, such as his empiricism, also bear resemblance to Locke ( Berry 2013 ). It is known that Smith read Locke’s *Essay*, as it is mentioned several times in his *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* ( 1795) as well as in part VI, section III of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* ( 1759), where he acknowledges Locke as the source of the moral sense as well as the core of smithian ethics. Smith conceives language in both his *Considerations Concerning on the First Formation of Languages* ( 1761 ) and in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in a lockean key as a means of communication. Nevertheless, Smith advanced certain insights regarding linguistic communication which cannot be traced to Locke.

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Aarsleff (1982: 42-83).

In tandem with his empiricist perspective, Smith takes on the three aforementioned theses in order to argue for a linguistic primitive which relates linguistic communication to economic behavior; to Smith, linguistic communication and economic behaviour are intricately and inseparably interwoven.

Throughout his writings Adam Smith outlined a theory of language functions and linguistic communication which is related to economic behaviour. Berry (1974) , Coseriu ( 1968), Plank (1992), Dascal ( 2006), and Alonso-Cortés and Cabrillo (2012), among others, have recently addressed Smith's ideas on language, the last authors defining three distinguishing functions of language in Smith's work : communicative, narrative and aesthetic functions. The communicative function takes on two forms: persuasive (Smith 1776 I :25) and sympathetic (Smith 1762-63 [ 1963]) . Smith takes the persuasive function of language from classical rhetoric, according to which (Aristotle 1988:1358b10) the main function of language is for the speaker to persuade the listener. However, what is truly original in Smith's work is the link he envisages between language and economic behaviour. At various points in his work, Smith wondered how the trucking disposition which underlies trading was made possible, and finds the answer in persuasion. As early as 1762/3 Smith asserts that the disposition to truck is founded on persuasion:

If we should enquire into the principle in the human mind on which this disposition of trucking is founded, it is clearly the natural inclination that everyone has to persuade. The offering of a shilling, which to us appears to have so plain and simple a meaning, is in reality offering an argument to persuade one to do so and so it is for his interest. (Smith, 1762/3 [1982] : 352 )

It follows that the division of labour originates as a consequence of persuasion, which is but one, though crucial, function of language. Thus, in his most celebrated and well known work of 1776, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* Smith suggests that the division of labour is “*the necessary consequence of the faculties of reason and speech*”:

This division of labour, from which so many advantages are derived, is not originally the effect of any human wisdom...It is the necessary, though very slow and gradual consequence of a certain propensity in human

nature...to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another. Whether this propensity be one of those original in human nature..., or whether, as seems more probable, it be the necessary consequence of the faculties of reason and speech, it belongs not to our present subject inquiry. (Smith 1776 [1976] I : 25)

The division of labour has been alluded to many times, as far back as the Greek philosophers, and later by William Petty (1690) and Bernard Mandeville (1732). Locke ( 1690, II. xviii) approached this idea when he relates new complex ideas of actions in arts and trades to innovative names:

The signifying of them [Actions] to one another was most necessary,..., and that the things they were continually to give and receive information about, might be easier and quicker understood. That this is so ... is evident in the Names, which in several Arts have been found out, and applied to several complex ideas of modified actions belonging to their several Trades. (Locke, 1690, II. xviii.7)

Nevertheless, the notion that language is linked to the division of labour seems to be a concept exclusive to Smith ( Guang-Zhen Sun 2005).

Smith's ideas regarding language and labour were well known to the intellectual world due to his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* of 1759 ( Campbell 1971 ; Griswold 1999). Not long after, Smith's 1776 work quickly spread through European intelligentsia, both in economic and philosophical circles ( Milgate and Stimson 1996). Smith's original ideas regarding the link between language and labour spread quickly, though mysteriously, through 19th century European thought, possibly through the work of Hegel (1807 [1986 : 347]) and Hegel (1821 [ 1971:281-286 ]). In the latter work, Hegel mentions the political economists Smith, Say and Ricardo.<sup>2</sup>

To highlight Smith's originality it is interesting to remark that even in previous analyses of the division of labour such as Petty or Mandeville, which use an approach similar to Smith's, no relationship between the division of labour and language is established. This is true even for William Petty, who was concerned with issues of language and grammar, eventually publishing *A Dictionary of Sensible Words*. In his years as professor at Oxford, Petty joined the circle of linguist and mathematician, John

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<sup>2</sup> Habermas ( 1967:132) has highlighted the influence of political economists on Hegel.

Wallis, and mathematician and philosopher, John Wilkins, who would, in due course, go on to take part in a project dealing with universal language. Petty's ideas regarding linguistics, however, did not seem to inform his political economy theories. Even though Mandeville (1732:266) addresses the topic of language to a certain extent in his satire, arguing in favor of a persuasive function of language, one could search in vain for even a passing link between language and the division of labour. For that, we must turn to Adam Smith.

The relationship between the communicative use of language, trade and the division of labour in Smith is not an explicit matter and he did not work out a detailed chapter or book on this relationship. Even so, Smith's economic and linguistic theories do provide sufficient support for this associative claim. First of all, Smith defends the position that both the division of labour and language and cooperation are exclusive traits to human beings: "It is common to all men, and to be found in no other race of animals, which seem to know neither this nor any other species of contracts" ( Smith 1776 vol. I: 25). According to Smith, animals acquire what they want from other animals or man by way of adulation. And while man also uses this technique, the habitual mode is by way of persuasion:

He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-interest in his favour, and show them that it is for their advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer . . . so it is the same trucking disposition which originally gives occasion to the division of labour. (Smith 1776 vol. I : 26)

Although in the preceding passages of the *The Wealth of Nations* Smith suggests that both reason and speech are responsible for the division of labour, further sections of Smith (1776:27), as well as Smith (1766:56), are less ambiguous about this association, concluding that this division is ultimately dependent on persuasion.

Smith's intuition, which understands the division of labour as a result of the communicative function of language, has struck a chord not only in Economics, but also in Linguistics. As follows, language for Smith is a manifestly communicative and

cooperative system, as opposed to Condillac's (1746) conception, which understands language as merely an intellectual activity that facilitates thinking.<sup>3</sup>

The link between linguistic communication and the division of labour introduces language as a phenomenon of social cooperation. Smith makes it known that only where there is a cooperative division of labour will there also be communication as a requirement of cooperation.

It is worth remarking once and again that these ideas appear in nineteenth century linguistics without any reference to Smith. Although they might be independently found, it is nonetheless remarkable that the origin of the connectedness between language and labour was first proposed by an economist. I would suggest that they actually originate in Smith's political economy. This paper attempts to retrace how the smithian conception of language has entered into the study of Linguistics by identifying some of the authors that have made use of Smith's ideas and interpreted his work in Linguistic terms.

## 2. Language and labour in nineteenth century linguistics

The division of labour linked to linguistic communication has proved to be one of the most fertile ideas Smith supplied to the scientific arena. The idea of the division of labour is not original to Smith, as we discussed above, though, the original parts of Smith's contribution are summed up nicely in the following two affirmations.

The first was made by Joseph Schumpeter (1954 [1963: 187]), who considers the division of labour as the impetus of economic progress: "Nobody, either before or after Smith, ever thought of putting such a burden upon the division of labour".

The second has to do with the link between language and the division of labour. As we shall see, this affirmation, well entrenched in 19th century Linguistic thought, envisages language in lockean terms, principally and fundamentally, as a mode of *communication*.

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<sup>3</sup> Sometimes the Enlightenment thinkers adopted the view that language was a means of communication; see for example under *langue*, 'language', in the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and D'Alembert. Diderot (1751) assumes the communicative function of language.

The following sections trace some prominent landmarks in the development of “language and the division of labour” by identifying the authors who use it and the nuances which give rise to.

2.1. Hegel in several of his writings, mainly *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807) and *The Philosophy of Right* (1821), lays the groundwork by which language and the division of labour are intrinsically linked.

The relationship between Adam Smith’s economic theory and Hegel’s philosophy has been known for some time ( Mandel 1971 and Henderson & Davis 1991). It is not farfetched to surmise that Hegel adopted Adam Smith’s (1776) ideas regarding labour, and in particular the division of labour, as language and labour are both essential features of man. The main reason for asserting that Hegel adopts his ideas regarding the link between language and labour from Smith is the extraordinary originality of this claim. It should not go unnoticed that the development of these two ideas arose nearly in tandem between 1776 and 1807, the dates on which *The Wealth of Nations* and *The Phenomenology of Mind*, respectively, were published. In fact, the concept of work as a hub of human anthropology is a notion that Hegel adopts entirely from Smith, as highlighted by, among others, Kojève (1947).

It is a well known fact that Hegel knew Smith’s work, inasmuch as he makes reference to Smith in his writings (1821 [1970: § 189]<sup>4</sup>: “Political economy ... This is one of the sciences which have arisen out of the conditions of the modern world. Its development affords the interesting spectacle (as in Smith, Say and Ricardo) of thought working upon the endless mass of details ....”

Hegel directly reflects the idea of Smith’s division of labour:

An animal’s needs ...are restricted in scope. Though man is subject to this restriction too, yet at the same time he evinces his transcendence of it and his universality, first by the multiplication of needs and means of satisfying them, and secondly by the differentiation and division of concrete need into single parts ... ( Hegel 1821 § 190 A)

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<sup>4</sup> Rae (1896 [2006 ] :201)) states that Smith’s (1776) work was translated to German in 1776 and 1778. Its impact was higher in Hanover and Göttingen than in other parts of Germany.



Recent biographies of Hegel have only confirmed the presence of Smith's quintessential ideas in Hegel's work. Pinkard (2001:672) provides facts which demonstrate that a young Hegel in 1791 acquired an English version of Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* in Bern, Switzerland. It is also known that Hegel even studied the financial system for the administration of Bern. Pinkard (2000: 174) also affirms that in a series of conference notes (read notes) which were presented in Jena in 1803-1804, the Jena System Drafts (*Jenaer Systementwürfe*), Hegel mentions the division of labour and offers the example of the pin factory, which is also referenced in Smith (1776 [1976: 15]).

We also have the testimony of Marx, who claims that Hegel adopted the view of political economists (Smith, Say, Steuart) who assert that labour is the essence of man:

Hegel adopts the standpoint of modern political economy. He grasps labour as the essence, the self-confirming essence of man; he sees only the positive and not the negative side of labour. Labour is man's coming to be for himself without alienation or as alienated man. (Marx 1844 [1968: 573])

Finally, Neuhouser (2011: 284-286) argues that Hegel adopts Smith's (1776) concept of Social Science because it explains the rationale for Smith's (1776) "commercial society". Neuhouser explicitly states that the influence of Smith's work on Hegel's writings comes directly from *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*.

It is in the first three chapters of the first book of this work where Smith offers his conjectures on human labour, its relationship to language, and the lack of trade in animals. All ideas which, not surprisingly, reappear in Hegel<sup>5</sup>.

Hegel<sup>6</sup> addresses language throughout his writings with different perspectives in accordance with the philosophical context. Thus, in *The Phenomenology of Mind* Hegel

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<sup>5</sup> Pinkard (2000:483) observes that in *The Philosophy of Right* Smith's ideas are also present. The influence of Smith on Hegel has been studied by Henderson and Davis (1991) and Hermann-Pillath and Boldyrev (2014), among others.

links language and labour, and both are addressed in accordance with the phenomenological method.

Hegel (1807 [1986: 376]) states that both language and labour originate from the interior of the individual and manifest in actions with results as other behaviors (*Taten*).

Hegel's argument is as follows. Human activity has two sides: one internal and one external. The inner side comes from consciousness, while the outside is action. Language and labour are

outer expressions in which the individual no longer retains possession of himself per se, but lets the inner get right outside him, and *surrenders it to something else .... in language and action the inner turns itself into something else, into an other* and thereby puts itself at the mercy of the element of change. (Hegel 1807 [1986: 235] )

The activity of both language and labour affects or influences others to “be something that exists in other individuals”.

Hegel, mirroring Smith (1776), thus concludes, via phenomenology, that language persuades or “changes” others, while labour occurs and meets the needs of others<sup>7</sup>.

On the exterior side, language and labour are organs that perform actions. Thus, Hegel writes:

The mouth that speaks, the hand that works, with the legs too are the operative organs effecting the actual realization, and they contain the action qua action, or the inner as such; the externality, however, which the inner obtains by their means is the deed, the act, in the sense of a reality separated and cut off from the individual. (Hegel 1807 [1970: 235] ).

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<sup>6</sup> The topic of language in Hegel's work has been addressed by Simon (1966), Bodammer (1969), Cook (1973), Jere O'Neill Surber (2011) and Forster (2011), among others.

<sup>7</sup> Bodammer (1969: 89).

Language, according to Hegel, is for others and is performed as a communicative function, just as it is for Smith (1759, 1776). So says Hegel (1807 [1970: 376]): ‘Language is ... for others. The I, that expresses itself, is apprehended as an ego; it is a kind of infection in virtue of which it establishes at once to unity with those who are aware of it, that kindles a spark of universal consciousness of self’.

This communicative conception of language as envisaged in the preface to Hegel (1807), where language is conceived as a mode of communication, (*Mitteilung*), permits accordance between members of a community:

For the nature of humanity is to impel men to agree with one another, and its very existence lies simply in the explicit realization of a community of consensus life. What is anti-human, the condition of mere animals, consists in keeping within the sphere of feeling pure and simple, and in being able to communicate only by way of feeling-states.<sup>8</sup> (Hegel 1807 [ 1986: 65 ])

In another fundamental text, Hegel directly relates the social division of labour (“preparing the particularized means appropriate to our similarly particularized needs”) with language:

Through labour the raw material directly supplied by nature is specifically adapted to these numerous ends by all sorts of processes...man in what he consumes is mainly concerned with the products of men. The multiplicity of objects and situations which excite interest is the stage on which theoretical education develops. This education consists in...a flexibility and rapidity of mind, ability to pass from an idea to another, to grasp complex and general relations. It is the education of the understanding in every way, and so also the building up of a language. (Hegel 1821[1970: § 196-197])<sup>9</sup>

In other cases, the link between language and labour in Hegel is indirect. Just as Smith (1776:70-73) excludes animals in the exchange of goods and

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<sup>8</sup> Translation by J.B. Baillie of Hegel (1967).

<sup>9</sup> English translation of Hegel (1952) by T.M. Knox .

the division of labour because they do not possess language as man does, Hegel (1832 [1969: 259]) as well states that animals do not perform work, yet have only voice (*Stimme*). Animals, therefore, do not interact with other animals because “animals remain in the realm of feeling and communicate through it” (Hegel 1807 [198: 61]).<sup>10</sup>

In the words of Simon (1966: 104):

Labour, as a predominantly practical behavior, leads precisely to a theoretical behaviour and thus provides unity to both forms of behavior. And this does not stop giving relative reason to theories that envisage the origin of language in labour.<sup>11</sup>

In short, Hegel considers that language and labour share the commonality of being externalized actions which reflect the inner consciousness. They are a being to the ‘other’ which also affects the ‘other’. Therefore, language is communication, because it is for others and through others that speaker and listener collaborate toward a common goal. As well, labour is for others because it meets the needs and desires of others, which are communicated by way of language.

The most relevant idea that arises from the relationship between language and labour is that of language as communication. This idea spread gradually since Smith and Hegel, and is even reflected in the words of Humboldt:

Evidently, language develops only socially, and man understands himself only once he has tested the intelligibility of his words by trial with others.... The greater and more active the social collaboration on a language, the more it gains, under otherwise similar circumstances. What language makes necessary in the simple act of thought creation is also necessarily repeated in the mental life of man; social communication

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<sup>10</sup> Habermas (1967:145), discussing Hegel’s early philosophy that Hegel makes labour dependent “on communicative conditions that make cooperation possible.”

<sup>11</sup> The idea has been carried out further in the 20th century in Habermas (1981:173-181).

through language provides him with conviction and stimulus.<sup>12</sup> (Humboldt 1836 [ 1979 :429 ])

Other linguists also adopted the concept of language as communication resulting from the relationship between language and labour that Smith and Hegel proposed. Thus Madvig (1842: 61-82), who references Hegel twice, argues strongly in favor of the idea that the essence of language is communication. K.W.L. Heyse<sup>13</sup> (1856: 41-46), and especially W. Whitney (1867), wholeheartedly agree with Madvig (1842).

The idea that labour is one of the roots of language, and that language originates in labour, gained much currency in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. One need not search further than Geiger (1872, vol. 2: 191-206)<sup>14</sup> and Noiré (1877: 323) for convincing proof. Both Geiger (1868: 116) and Noiré (1877: 23) refer to Hegelian ideas of language in their work. Engels (1876) as well placed the origin of language in the workplace. The idea finally reaches Wilhelm Wundt (1900: 263) who also echoes the idea that language finds its origins in labour.

Cassirer (1923 [1956]: 259) summarizes:

The social form of labour is what particularly made possible the social function of language as a means of communication ... As sound did not originate in an isolated activity, but rather in the common activity of man, from the beginning language has had a sense of community ... Language and rational life sprang from community activity aimed at a common purpose, sprang from labour.

## 2.2. A natural sequel to Hegel is Marx and Engels's *The German Ideology*

In this volume Marx and Engels only briefly addressed language, and did so only in relation to certain aspects of idealist philosophy, which the authors

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<sup>12</sup> The Hegelian conception of language was present in 19th century Linguistics up until the birth of the Neogrammarians. According to Steinthal (1848), the philosophy of language in W.von Humboldt is essentially Hegelian in nature and conception. Frequently Humboldt (1836) refers to language as *Arbeit des Geistes*, or 'labour of the mind'.

<sup>13</sup> Heyse was a student of Hegel in Berlin.

<sup>14</sup> An outline of the different theories of the linguists which follow can be found in Steinthal (1888).

criticize. Thus, referring to the spirit and awareness of idealist philosophy they emphasize that neither the spirit nor the conscience exist as pure forms, but appear linked to something material, like sound and the need for human communication:

From the start the 'spirit' is afflicted with the curse of being 'burdened' with matter, which makes its appearance in the form of ...sounds, in short, language. Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men...; language, like consciousness, arises from the need, the necessity of intercourse with other men. (Marx and Engels 1846 [2004: 51])

Once language and tribal, or gregarious, consciousness form, it is up to the division of labour to develop the practical consciousness by expanding human needs:

The sheep-like or tribal consciousness receives its further development and extension through increased productivity, the increase of needs, and, what is fundamental to both of these, the increase of population. With these develops the division of labour. (K. Marx and F. Engels 1846 [2004 :51 ])

2.3. In contrast with Marx and Engels, Darwin adopts the principle of the physiological division of labour and its connections to language. First, in *On the Origin of Species* of 1859, Darwin adopts the [physiological] idea of the division of labour in order to explain the specialization of animal organs with a base in the zoological conception of Milne-Edwards (1851). That this conception is rooted in Smithian philosophy (1776) is well documented in Schweber (1980). Later, in *The Descent of Man*, and *Selection in Relation to Sex*, Darwin (1871, vol. I: 82) explicitly adopts both the theories of social division and labour in relation to communication in line with Smith's (1759) *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Subsequently, Darwin proposes an indirect argument affirming that language allows for the social division of labour.

According to Darwin, articulate language is the result of the intellectual capabilities of man, whose progress depends on the capacity to verbally express complex ideas:

Through his [of the Man] powers of intellect, articulate language has been evolved; and on this his wonderful advancement has mainly depended. He has invented and is able to use various weapons, tools, traps, &c., with which he defends himself, kills or catches prey, and otherwise obtain food. (Darwin 1871, vol. I: 137)

At the same time, Darwin states that the division of labour and the exchange of goods existed in primitive man:

We have evidence of this [the production of knives, lances, or arrow-heads] in the primeval men having practiced a division of labour; each man did not manufacture his own flint tools or rude pottery ; but certain individuals appear to have devoted themselves to such work, no doubt receiving in exchange the produce of the chase. (Darwin 1871 vol. I :138).

In the first claim Darwin establishes that human progress is due to language, and in the second, that human progress began with the production of tools, pumps, traps, etc., resulting from the division of labour and the exchange of these products for food, etc. One can deduce from these two premises that the division of labour and the exchange of goods are a consequence of language. Remarkably, these are precisely the claims presented in Smith (1776 [1976: 24]).

One point of agreement between Smith, Hegel and Darwin is the exclusion of animals, or the exclusivity of humans, both in the division of labour and the exchange of goods. Smith insists that animals do not have language to persuade, and thus cannot, *a priori*, exchange goods:

Nobody ever saw a dog make a fair and deliberate exchange of one bone for another with another dog. Nobody ever saw one animal by its gestures and natural cries signify to another, this is mine, that yours; I am willing to give this for that. When an animal wants to obtain something either of a man or of another animal, it has no other means of persuasion but to gain the favor of those whose service it requires. (Smith 1776 [1976 : 26])

By contrast, as concerns man, Smith (1776 [1976:26]) writes : “whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer”.

In acquiescence with Smith’s ideas, Darwin never mentioned the exchange of goods or articulate speech in any species other than human, articulate speech understood as a system of correspondence between sound and ideas (Darwin 1871: 54). For man at least, language, the exchange of goods and the division of labour are interconnected, as much according to Darwin (1871) as to Smith (1776).

2.4. Following the path set forth by Hegel, Marx, and Darwin, the philosopher Herbert Spencer related language and the division of labour to the cohesiveness of human society. Spencer’s interests spanned diverse scientific fields. He attained a synthesis of the science of his time in the fields of biology, sociology, psychology, and anthropology. He also addressed language, although tangentially. His synthetic philosophy gained currency both in England and in continental Europe, including Germany. Hermann Paul did not escape the influence of Spencer.

Herbert Spencer, who defended evolution before Darwin, was a strong advocate of both Darwin’s theory as well as Adam Smith’s theories proposed in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and the *Wealth of Nations*.

Spencer also established an indirect connection between language and the division of labour. After entering into a division of labour, says Spencer, a social organism is generated, which unlike a biological organism needs language to establish cooperation and cohesion among its members.

The principle of the division of labour was addressed by Spencer (1851: 453) in order to explain the diversity of roles in society. Later, Spencer, in the first volume of *The Principles of Sociology*, develops this principle as a source of “social body”, which is fully discrete (a discrete whole) as compared to the actual continuity of the biological organism:

The division of labour, first dwelt on by political economists as a social phenomenon , and thereupon recognized by biologist as a phenomenon of living bodies , which they call the “ physiological division of labour”, is that which in the society, as in the animal, makes it a living whole. (Spencer 1876: 452)



But the totality of human society is discrete, i.e. it consists of discrete units (Spencer 1876: 459), as compared to the continuity of the units of a biological organism, which form a concrete totality (concrete whole): “the discreteness of the social organism stands in marked contrast with the concreteness of the single organism...” Later, Spencer ponders how cooperation could be established in a discrete, or discontinuous social organism, concluding that cooperation is achieved through language:

Though coherence among its parts is a prerequisite to that co-operation by which the life of an individual organism is carried on; and though the members of a social organism, not forming a concrete whole, cannot maintain cooperation by means of physical influences directly propagated from part to part; yet they can and do maintain co-operation by another agency. Not in contact, they nevertheless affect one another through intervening spaces, both by emotional language and by the language, oral and written of the intellect. For carrying on mutually-dependent actions, it is requisite that impulses, adjusted in their kinds, amounts, and times, shall be conveyed from part to part. This requisite is fulfilled in societies by the signs of feelings and thoughts, conveyed from person to person... That is to say, the inter-nuncial function, not achievable by stimuli physically transferred, is nevertheless achieved by language emotional and intellectual.

(Spencer 1876:460)

2.5. As noted above, the synthetic philosophy of Herbert Spencer had a great impact both in England and elsewhere in Europe (Stocking 1987). In 1875 his *System der synthetischen Philosophie* was published in Germany, and it is no coincidence that Herman Paul mentioned Spencer’s 1852 essay *The Philosophy of Style*, in his *Principles of the History of Language* (Paul 1889: 115). It is of little doubt that Paul was aware of the relevance that the work of the English philosopher had to Linguistics<sup>15</sup>. Spencer, as we have seen, gave great prominence to the role of the division of labour in biology and

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<sup>15</sup> Spencer, like Paul, espouses what would today be called a functionalist perspective of language.

sociology in the nineteenth century, a role which would not be overlooked by the Neogrammarian theorists as it pertains to language.

Hermann Paul's *Principles of the History of Language* published in several editions between 1880-1920, well reflects the science of its time, and took into account the importance that the division of labour had from the perspective of sociological functionalism. It is of no coincidence that Paul linked language both to the division of labour and its communicative function<sup>16</sup>. As Paul asserts, the study of language belongs to the science of culture (*Kulturwissenschaft*), a social science, which in turn depends on the division of labour (*Arbeitsteilung*):

It is not until what an individual has gained becomes transferred to other individuals and till several individuals co-operate to the same end, that a growth beyond these narrow limits is possible. Not merely the industrial arts, but every kind of culture depends upon the principle of the division of labour and upon co-operation. (Paul 1886 [1889]: xxx)

The principle of division of labour acts as a natural organism in culture:

In this respect, the history of the development of organic nature approaches closely the history of culture. Every higher organization is the result of the agency of a quantity of cells which co-operate according to the principle of the division of labour. (Paul 1889: xxx)

This principle, writes Paul, operates at the level of the single cell. In the same way as in culture and language, the division of labour acts at the level of the individual, though not as an autonomous body as in *Volksgeist* (spirit or mind of the people) as per Lazarus and Steinthal (both defenders of *Völkerpsychologie* Philosophy). The argument underlying the rejection of *Völkerpsychologie*, as Paul sees it (1889: xxxvi, footnote 1) is “to trace the development of language from the reciprocal effects which individuals

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<sup>16</sup> The citations of Paul are taken from the second English edition and contrasted with the last German edition of 1920. In accordance with Koerner (1972 [1988]: 25), since the second edition of 1886 “the main principles remain almost completely unaltered throughout the subsequent editions”.

produce on each other”. Such effects, as they were conceived, emerge through speech sounds which are produced by individuals. These speech sounds are, for Paul (1889: xxxix), the most important physical products to carry out these effects. Thus sounds are communication: “The effect of communication can be no other than this, that reposing certain masses of thoughts in the mind are thereby awakened, and raised to the level of consciousness ...”<sup>17</sup>

Yet again we witness the interconnection between the division of labour and language. Individuals cleaved by the division of labour are related by linguistic communication. Consequently, throughout the *Prinzipien* Paul continually reaffirms the communicative function of language (Paul 1889: xxxix, xlvi, 23,26,28,30, etc).

Nonetheless, Paul states that there is an important difference between the division of labour in the process of an economic system and the division of labour in a cultural body such as language. In the first, “We have to deal with the reciprocal operation of the entirety of physical and psychical factors with mankind which enters into any relation whatever“, while in linguistic processes “every linguistic creation is always the work of one single individual only...It never happens that several individuals create anything by working together with united forces and divided functions” (Paul 1889: xliii).

Although linguistic creation is the work of a single individual, the division of labour works in this other sense that Paul explains:

No doubt, so far as a linguistic creation is transferred to another individual and transformed by him, and as this process goes on repeating itself ever anew, a division of labour and a union of labour is apparent here; and indeed without such, as we have seen, no culture is conceivable. ( Paul 1889: xliii )

2.6. Finally, the link between language and the division of labour also appears in Bloomfield (1933:16), which is likely adopted from Paul. Indeed, Bloomfield (1933:16) recognizes the importance that *The Principles of the History of Language* has for linguistics and writes, “Paul’s book of Principles ... not so well written as Whitney’s, but more detailed and methodical, exercised a great influence on linguistic studies.”

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<sup>17</sup> Koerner (1972) also pointed this out.

Although Bloomfield rejected the psychologism of Paul, the influence that psychologism has on Bloomfield's conception of language is notable in many ways, one of which is dealt with below.

For Paul, as for Bloomfield, language provides a mechanism for cooperation in a group in which the division of labour is present. However, Bloomfield (1933: 24) points out more explicitly than Paul (and more in line with Smith<sup>18</sup> (1776)) that the division of labour is the result of language<sup>19</sup>: "In the ideal case within a group of people who speak to each other, each person has at his disposal the strength and skill of every other person in the group... *The division of labour and, with it, the whole working of human society, is due to language*<sup>20</sup>".

Bloomfield's reasoning, however, is closer to that of Spencer. For as the English philosopher said, the division of labour established a discontinuity between members of a community, but language builds a bridge between the speakers of that community: "*The gap between the bodies of the speaker and hearer –the discontinuity of the two nervous systems—is bridged by sound waves*" (Bloomfield 1933: 26).

Bloomfield (1933:27) falls short of calling the linguistic connection between individuals "communication", but rather refers to the coordination and interaction between individuals, defining a linguistic community as such (Bloomfield (1933:41)): "A speech community is a group of people who interact by means of speech". He goes on to employ "interact" and "interaction" in line with the *Sociological School of*

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<sup>18</sup> Bloomfield must certainly have known some of the classic economic texts. Zellig Harris (Koerner 1984: 78 ) comments that Bloomfield remarked that certain aspects outlined in *Das Kapital* by Marx suggest a certain similarity between linguistic and economic processes.

<sup>19</sup> It is possible that Bloomfield knew Spencer's *The Principles of Sociology* more than he knew Smith's work directly.

<sup>20</sup> Compare this with the effect of the division of labour as outlined in Adam Smith (1776 [1976: 22]) "Every workman has a great quantity of his own work to dispose of beyond what he himself has occasion for ; and every other workman being exactly in the same situation , he is enabled to exchange a great quantity of his own goods...We shall be sensible that without the assistance and *cooperation* of many thousands, the very meanest person in a civilized country could not be provided..."

*Chicago*, among whose members were Edward Sapir and George H. Mead<sup>21</sup>. It should be of little surprise that the definition of interaction as a symbolic expression was developed and employed by the *Sociological School of Chicago* between 1920 and 1940, years in which Bloomfield coincided with Sapir in Chicago. Thus, for Bloomfield (1933: 28) interaction (or communication) by way of language envisages a language community as an organism:

The term society or social organism is not a metaphor. A human social group is really a unit of higher order than a single animal, just as a many-celled animal is a unit of higher order than a single cell. The single cells in the many-celled animal co-operate by means of such arrangements as the nervous system; the individuals in a human society co-operate by means of sound waves<sup>22</sup>. (Bloomfield 1933: 28)

### 3. Toward a history of a compound idea

In this article we have traced some landmarks of the history of an idea that originated in the economic thought of Adam Smith: language and the division of labour are interrelated. The importance of this idea lies in the communicative function of language, highlighted in modern philosophy by John Locke. Locke assumed communication, but did not justify it. Adam Smith is the first to find a reason for the communicative function of language.

We have examined three trends in the history of the topic language and labour. The first expressed by Smith, Marx and Engels, Darwin, and Bloomfield, postulates that language *caused* the division of labour. A second trend, espoused by Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Mind*, envisages language and labour as interchangeable, a view which extends to the field of German linguistics throughout much of the

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<sup>21</sup> Bulmer (1984) provides a history of the *Sociological School of Chicago* and noted that Sapir's role in this organization stood out.

<sup>22</sup> Bloomfield calls communication by language "cooperation between speakers". Bloomfield's relationship with the *School of Chicago* is greater than his relation to Watson's behaviourism. Bloomfield (1933) never states that a verbal response is conditioned, but rather that a verbal response is a "proper response" to a certain stimulus.

nineteenth century. Finally, the third trend represented by Hermann Paul, which is probably inspired by Spencer, holds that language is a consequence of the division of labour.

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